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Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7933rd meeting
Friday, 28 April 2017, 6 p.m.
New York

President:	Ms. Sison	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Egypt	Mr. Kandeel
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Kawamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Akylbayev
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation concerning Western Sahara

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara (S/2017/307)

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The meeting was called to order at 6.15 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Western Sahara

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara (S/2017/307)

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2017/362, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United States of America.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/307, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2351 (2017).

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the United States of America.

Ambassador Haley would have liked to have been here for this important adoption — an adoption during our presidency in which we emphasized one of our key peacekeeping principles, that peacekeeping missions should support political solutions. Our postponement of the adoption was key to allowing the United Nations and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to close out the past year's chapter in the Western Sahara, illustrating in real time the value of the United Nations and of the Mission.

I should like to take a moment now to recognize the Personal Envoy to the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Chris Ross, for his eight years of service. The United States is grateful for his tireless efforts to support a political process for Western Sahara. We look forward to the appointment of a new envoy and his travel to the region as quickly as possible. We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Kim Bolduc, for all her work managing the peacekeeping mission.

The United States is pleased with the adoption of today's mandate renewal for two reasons.

First, resolution 2351 (2017) helps put the Council's attention back where it belongs, supporting a political process to resolve the conflict in Western Sahara. For years, the United Nations and the Council have been bogged down. On the ground, peacekeepers have faced an almost endless series of frustrating obstructions, which often require months or even years of high-level engagement to sort out. Here in the Council, we often end up in debates about hyperspecific operational problems.

This situation needs to change. Of course, the parties need to let the Mission do its job without interference, and they need to respect all existing agreements. That is the bare minimum of what we must expect, but the Council also has to look at the big picture on Western Sahara. The big picture is that we have not seen significant political progress for years. That is the fundamental problem we need to address in the months to come. The United States therefore fully supports the Secretary-General's call to relaunch negotiations with a new dynamic and a new spirit. The resolution reinforces the fact that the Security Council shares the Secretary-General's goals. It shows that we expect the parties to work with the United Nations to come back to the table. As the resolution demands, the Secretary-General will now be reporting on whether we have seen progress. The Council will be watching what the parties do closely.

Secondly, the resolution sets a new standard for the performance of the Mission. We are asking the United Nations to set clear and measurable benchmarks for what the Mission and its staff will achieve. The Mission needs to be able to hire staff with the right skills to be as effective as possible and to adjust components that are not working as well as they could be. That may sound like common sense, but we do not always see it happening on the ground. We look forward to the

United Nations reporting back to the Council on how the Mission does.

Making sure that peacekeeping missions have an impact is a top priority for the United States. With today's resolution, we take another step towards that goal. The United States will be watching closely to see what progress is being made on the ground. MINURSO must be part of a broader effort to achieve a mutually acceptable resolution of the conflict in Western Sahara. Returning to negotiations will, of course, be a difficult task, but the United States is committed to doing what we can to facilitate the United Nations work. Let us not be distracted from our goal of finding a mutually acceptable political solution to the conflict that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

We continue to view Morocco's autonomy plan as serious, credible and realistic, and it represents one potential approach to satisfying the aspirations of the people in Western Sahara to run their own affairs in peace and dignity. Again, we expect the parties to work with the United Nations to come back to the table and we call on all members of the Council to focus on fnding an enduring peace for a conflict that has continued for far too long.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the other members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Groundhog Day. Every year on 2 February, a ritual is celebrated in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, in which the groundhog Phil makes a brief appearance, playing an important but limited role in determining whether spring will come early or winter will last another six weeks. On that day in Punxsutawney, the local and international press covers the event widely, but the following day the issue disappears from the news and we hear no more about the charming Phil until the following year. Does anyone here know where Phil is today?

Similarly, every year at the end of April — and only once a year — we carry out a ritual in the Council in which the issue of Western Sahara makes a brief appearance in an open debate that plays an important but limited role in considering solely the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). On this day in New York, the local and international press widely covers this event, but as with Punxsutawney Phil the issue disappears from the news and no one hears anything about it until the following year. Unlike many other situations, the issue of Western Sahara and the Secretary-General's report are never addressed in open briefings of the Council.

Since this is a practice that has been going on for more than two decades, we believe that it is not contingent on the preferences of the elected members of the Council, which are in no position to change this practice during their brief tenures, however much we may attempt to fight similar practices — as my delegation does by insisting on taking the floor regularly before the members in open meetings of the Council.

My delegation therefore decided over the past 12 months that we must not forget the situation to which MINURSO was subject last year. Through other bodies, it has regularly sought information on the state of functionality of the Mission, which was seriously affected by the expulsion of its entire civilian staff in March 2016. Finally, three days ago on Tuesday, 25 April, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Ms Kim Bolduc, orally reported in consultations to the Council that, with the return to Western Sahara of the last 17 officials, the Mission had resumed full functionality.

Let me repeat yet again that peacekeeping missions are established by the Security Council. The mandates determined by the Security Council, as well as status-of-forces and status-of-mission agreements, are binding contracts between the troop-contributing countries and the United Nations. What is more, they are guarantees that protect the personnel that countries voluntarily contribute to peacekeeping missions. It is therefore obvious that these commitments can be altered only by those endowed with the corresponding international legitimacy, which in this case is the Security Council. No Member of the United Nations can unilaterally change these commitments and obligations. The return of the civilian staff to Western Sahara and the resumption of the full functionality of MINURSO are proof of that.

Since 1963, 54 years ago, Western Sahara has been recognized by the United Nations as a non-self-governing Territory in the process of decolonization. We must recall that MINURSO was established with

a mandate to carry out a referendum to determine the final status of the non-self-governing Territory of Western Sahara so that its people can exercise their right to self-determination and choose between independence, association with an independent State or integration into an independent State. We fully support the commitment of the Secretary-General to finding a solution to the question of Western Sahara and his express intention to propose the resumption of the negotiating process with a new impetus and a new spirit.

In that regard, we encourage the parties to take positive steps and to launch a dialogue that will lead to a just and lasting political solution acceptable to all parties and guarantee the free self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The difficult situation in which the population of Western Sahara finds itself deserves the heightened attention of the international community, and of the Security Council in particular.

Last but not least, my delegation thanks you, Madam President, for guiding the work that led to the adoption of resolution 2351 (2017) at all levels, from the experts in your delegation to the Permanent Representatives. Throughout a number of days of arduous work, we were able to participate directly in finding a solution that, as demonstrated by the unanimous vote, resulted in the successful drafting of the resolution.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): Sweden voted in favour of resolution 2351 (2017) because it represents a real opportunity to resolve one of the most long-standing disputes on the agenda of the United Nations. More importantly it represents an opportunity to address the plight of the people of Western Sahara. With today's adoption, after a year that saw many challenges, we can now turn the page. The resolution contains a number of elements that we believe lay a path towards resolving the issue of the status of Western Sahara.

First, today's resolution sends a strong, clear and unified signal that the time has come to resume negotiations that will lead to a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The resolution provides strong backing to the Secretary-General and his proposal to relaunch the political process with "a new dynamic and a new spirit". We welcome the Secretary-General's direct engagement. This is really diplomacy for peace in action with the Secretary-General using his good offices to engage actively with the parties and with the full support of the Council. We fully agree with his view that a resumption of the political process is urgently needed. In 2007 and 2008, four rounds of negotiations took place, but little progress was made. Since then, the political process has been at a standstill, despite the efforts of successive Secretaries-General and Personal Envoys, to whom we pay tribute.

Secondly, the resolution encourages a new Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General to reinvigorate efforts towards a political solution, and also calls upon the parties and the neighbouring States to fully cooperate with that envoy. We look forward to working together with a new envoy once appointed.

Thirdly, the Council is also calling, for the first time, for the meaningful participation of women in the political process. The participation of women would inject new energy into the political process.

Clearly, the resolution that we have just adopted sends a strong signal to the parties that the time has come to show renewed determination to engage in the political process and for neighbouring States to contribute. As the Secretary-General states in his report (S/2017/307), difficult decisions will be required from all of us if the current framework of negotiations is to achieve results. While we all hope that these will be forthcoming, our patience cannot last forever, and the Secretary-General has noted that appropriate conclusions must be drawn in the case of absence of progress. In that regard, we note that all possible solutions, including the holding of a referendum, must be kept on the table.

We also supported the resolution because it sent a strong call to the parties that respecting the ceasefire and related agreements is critical, and that violations cannot be accepted. We welcome the fact that the parties have now withdrawn from the buffer strip in Guerguerat, thereby creating an environment conducive to the relaunch of a political process.

With this resolution, the Council also reiterates its full support for the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), which plays a key role in a complex environment. The Mission has gone through a challenging year, and we welcome its return to full functionality. Equally important, the resolution highlights the plight of Sahrawi refugees, the deteriorating humanitarian situation and the potential risk of reductions in food assistance given a lack of funding. The Sahrawi refugees have lived for more

than 40 years under harsh conditions. This is one of the Organization's oldest protracted refugee operations and the second longest-running refugee situation in the world. The resolution urges the international community to provide new and additional voluntary contributions to the humanitarian response.

We also supported the resolution because it encourages the parties to respect and promote human rights in Western Sahara and in the Tindouf refugee camps. It also strongly encourages enhanced cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, including further visits to the region.

We had many reasons to support the resolution, but that was the easy part. Without any doubt, we now have a lot of work ahead of us. The resolution that we have just adopted offers the best opportunity in a long time to relaunch a political process that has been dormant for almost a decade now. The path towards a mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, is now, with the adoption of this resolution, a little closer in sight.

Finally — and like Uruguay — I would like to commend the United States delegation, as penholder, for their extraordinary leadership on this issue, as well as their exemplary efforts in facilitating the negotiations on this resolution.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): In unanimously adopting resolution 2351 (2017), which extends for an additional 12 months the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), which expired on 30 April, the Security Council continues the constructive role played by the United Nations in the search for a definitive solution to the question of Western Sahara.

We would therefore once again like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara and Head of MINURSO, as well as the outgoing Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara. My delegation would also like to hail the leadership demonstrated yet again by the United States delegation in the conduct of the Council's work. We welcome the constructive spirit demonstrated by members of the Council, which ensured that we arrived at a text that nurtures hope for the ongoing political process.

The concerns reiterated in the resolution just adopted are proof of the widely shared determination to tackle challenges in the region and to assist the parties to reach a fair, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution. Furthermore, I would like to highlight and welcome efforts made by the Kingdom of Morocco and by the Secretariat in an ongoing and intense dialogue that facilitated progress on several crucial issues, creating an appropriate framework for negotiations between parties. It is our hope therefore that this cooperation will produce the necessary progress on other key matters, and that cooperation between the Secretariat and other parties concerned could be guided by the same spirit of practicality and reconciliation.

I would also like to welcome the intention expressed by Secretary-General Guterres to relaunch the negotiating process, breathing new dynamism into it. In that context, Senegal would like to reiterate its belief that the initiative for autonomy proposed by Morocco in 2007 is a serious, credible and realistic matter for negotiation. We think that initiative should be taken into account as negotiations resume between the parties, with a view to reaching a fair, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, as I said earlier, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I wish to thank our colleagues from the United States for the serious efforts they made to ensure consensus was reached on resolution 2351 (2017). We appreciate the readiness they have demonstrated to accommodate all legitimate concerns.

We have all been following developments that have unfolded over the past several months surrounding the issue of Western Sahara, as well as the undeniable progress — although fledgling — that we had begun to see. We would have been even more pleased if the points we had raised, which did not amount to more than minor tweaking, had been taken on board. They were not, and we understand why not. Our effort was designed to ensure alignment with fundamental principles in the position of the African Union. All the same, we decided to vote in favour of the resolution because of our conviction that the Secretary-General appears to be committed to relaunch the peace process, and of our hope that there is a new spirit. Of course we also felt we needed to take into account the effort that has been made by the presidency to achieve the progress we saw.

That said, however, we would like to reiterate the importance of the restoration of the full functionality of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), whose role has become all the more significant in light of developments on the ground. We welcome the progress made in facilitating the return of the civilian component of MINURSO.

We are very pleased at the progress made surrounding the programme created in connection with the buffer zone. This should create a positive atmosphere for the relaunching of the peace process and de-escalate the tension. Both parties, with which we are equally friendly, should be called upon to honour their commitments to the agreement reached with MINURSO in relation to the ceasefire. They should refrain from taking any action that could undermine their agreement and further aggravate the situation on the ground.

The latest developments have underscored the need to exert renewed efforts for the resumption of talks between the parties to find a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution to the long-standing issue on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions. This is something that we have always supported based on our conviction that it would provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in the context of arrangements consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations.

In this connection, it is imperative that the Council understand the context of the problem we have been facing and fully support the proposal by Secretary-General António Guterres to relaunch the peace process with a new spirit and dynamism to achieve a mutually acceptable political solution to the Western Saharan issue, in accordance with all relevant Security Council resolutions. Any meaningful progress on the peace process hinges on the full cooperation of the two parties with the Secretary-General, and it is only appropriate that the Council call on the parties to commit themselves to resuming the fifth round of negotiations in good faith and without any conditions.

We believe that the appointment of a new Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara who commands the trust and confidence of both parties will be very critical to realizing that objective. It would be remiss of us to fail to take this opportunity to thank, following the presidency, Personal Envoy Mr. Christopher Ross for having been such an upright person in whom we can repose confidence. We wish to thank him for his service. We feel this is fair and proper.

We hope that the resumption of direct and serious talks between the parties without preconditions — what the African Union has been calling for and has fully supported now that Morocco has returned to the African Union family, which is a very important development which we welcome — might facilitate speeding up the process of finding an amicable solution to this long-standing dispute and that the African Union will have a supportive role in the United Nations-sponsored peace talks.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Western Sahara is currently facing a complicated situation. What is urgent now is to maintain stability in the region and create a favourable condition for relaunching the political process.

The Security Council has just adopted resolution 2351 (2017), renewing the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for one year and calling for the resumption of talks and the political process. This shows the determination of the Council to push for a political solution of the issue and adhere to the Mission's mandate.

On the issue of Western Sahara, China has always held an objective and impartial position. We encourage both parties, on the basis of relevant Council resolutions, to seek a negotiated solution that is just, lasting and mutually acceptable to both parties. We shall continue to support the United Nations in its effort to find a political solution of the issue of Western Sahara and we hope that MINURSO will continue to play an important role in implementing Security Council resolutions and stabilizing the situation in Western Sahara.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2351 (2017) and is happy to see that the Council has found unity on this matter. We thank the United States for its efforts as penholder, which helped bring the members of the Security Council together.

The text we have adopted today has extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for one year. I would like to pay tribute to the excellent work that MINURSO undertakes in an unstable security context. As soon as it is fully functional again, which

we welcome, it is important that it have the necessary resources to tackle the challenges on the ground.

The negotiations also served to resolve the crisis in Guerguerat following the withdrawal of the Polisario Front, which has just been confirmed by MINURSO. The joint efforts of the Secretary-General, who called for a withdrawal from the buffer strip on 25 February, and of the Council have produced desired results. We pleased about the fact that we can turn the page on this crisis. It is important that the ceasefire be upheld now in all circumstances and in a lasting manner.

I take this opportunity to thank the Personal Envoy Mr. Christopher Ross for his engagement and efforts.

Finally, the resolution clearly demonstrates the importance of relaunching the political process. The Council's support for the resumption of the political process was unambiguously expressed in terms of a new positive dynamism, which is already visible thanks to the Secretary-General, whose personal dedication I would like to pay tribute to once again. His outstanding report (S/2017/307) has set the tone. The goal of a fair, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution — one which is guided by the United Nations and is in line with relevant Security Council resolutions — is not unattainable. The role of neighbouring countries will be crucial, as emphasized by this resolution.

France continues to see the autonomy initiative presented by Morocco in 2007 as a credible and serious basis for a negotiated solution. The resolution of the conflict will allow for a return of security, stability and economic prosperity in the region. We reiterate our full support for the work of the United Nations and MINURSO. It is France's hope that the unanimous adoption of the resolution will allow us to be resolutely forward looking in order to promote the current political trends and begin together a new chapter in the history of the region that would benefit everyone.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes the adoption of resolution 2351 (2017), which renews the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and provides clear direction for the crucial work of MINURSO over the next 12 months. I particularly want to thank the United States for its hard work on the text of the resolution and my fellow Council members for the positive and constructive spirit in which negotiations took place this year.

Today's forward-looking resolution marks an important step in the path towards finding a solution to this decades-old conflict. Through this unanimous adoption, we have demonstrated the support within the Chamber for the vital mission of MINURSO. I especially welcome the strong commitment and support of the Secretary-General to relaunch the negotiating process with the aim of reaching a mutually acceptable political solution. I hope his personal involvement and the swift appointment of a new personal envoy will encourage all parties to cooperate fully with the United Nations over the next 12 months to achieve real progress. I also want to take this opportunity to thank Christopher Ross for his tireless commitment over the past eight years and for his endless search for a solution to this problem.

In conclusion, it is clear that this issue can be resolved only if progress is made on the political track. The Council has an important role to play in supporting MINURSO, the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy. Today's resolution is an important tool in support of the negotiation process and the efforts to achieve a mutually acceptable political solution. The United Kingdom, as ever, stands ready to support both parties in their efforts to achieve that goal.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): We are pleased with today's unanimous adoption of resolution 2351 (2017), which ensures that the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara will continue to fulfil its critical mandate in an increasingly complex and challenging operational environment. I would also like to thank the United States for its excellent presidency of the Security Council this month and its efforts to facilitate the complex negotiations on the resolution, and all Security Council members for the constructive and forward-looking approach that has led to today's consensus decision.

The news that the remaining elements of the Frente Polisario withdrew today from the buffer strip in Guergerat is important because it fulfils the Secretary-General's request. The latest developments on the ground are also proof of the results that can be achieved with persistent diplomacy on the part of the Council. We encourage the parties to continue upholding their commitment to the ceasefire agreement.

Italy is hopeful that the improvements in the situation on the ground and today's resolution will help to build the required momentum towards a rapid resumption of the political process. We believe this is a critical moment

for Western Sahara that presents an opportunity to fulfil the Secretary-General's objective — indeed, our objective — of revitalizing the political track with a new dynamic and a new spirit in order to reach a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that can provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

With today's resolution the Security Council affirms that it shares that vision and fully supports this urgent task. We therefore invite the parties to engage as soon as possible, without preconditions and in a spirit of compromise, in a new round of talks under the auspices of the Secretary-General and facilitated by the new Personal Envoy. At the same time, I would like to salute the outgoing Personal Envoy, Mr. Christopher Ross, and to thank him for his tireless efforts and personal commitment to the issue.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Plurinational State of Bolivia voted in favour of resolution 2351 (2017) because we believe that the parties will resume the political process with the goal of achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that accords with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. In that regard, we would like to express our commitment to ensuring that the efforts to enable the people of Western Sahara to achieve self-determination continue. The Plurinational State of Bolivia also underscores its support to the efforts of the Secretary-General and his new Personal Envoy to arrive at a political solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties. We commend the decisions of the Kingdom of Morocco and the Frente Polisario to withdraw from the Guergerat area, representing a clear expression of good will by both sides. We also reaffirm our support for the work being done by the United Nations Mission on the Referendum in Western Sahara.

Bolivia is a member of the Decolonization Committee and has strong ties of friendship with the people of Morocco and of the Sahara. We firmly believe that the only way that the peoples of the world can resolve any dispute is through dialogue, which is why we categorically reject any violent approach. We will continue to focus our efforts so that the Members of the United Nations ensure respect for the Charter of the United Nations and for the conduct of relations among States based on respect for the principles of equal rights and a people's right to self-determination.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the presidency for the conduct of the negotiations on today's resolution, which in our view were transparent, flexible and adapted to the situation on the ground. That flexibility enabled us to adopt the resolution unanimously, and that is due primarily to the way that the presidency, particularly as the penholder, moved the process forward. We are also grateful to your delegation and its experts, Madam President, for the political coordination, and to your country's Permanent Representative for their efforts in presiding over the Council this month.

Mr. Kawamura (Japan): I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the United States delegation for its effective guidance of the consultations on today's important adoption of resolution 2351 (2017). Japan also appreciates the Secretary-General's efforts to solve the Guergerat crisis and create an environment conducive to a resumption of the political process.

Japan voted in favor of the resolution extending the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for another year in recognition of its important role in monitoring the ceasefire that contributes to the region's peace and stability. As we mentioned during the Council's 6 April debate on peacekeeping (see S/PV.7918), we are eager to improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping. We need to assess whether the continued deployment of a given peacekeeping operation fits the reality on the ground and also hold deeper discussions in the Council in order to link political processes to mandates. MINURSO is an illustration of both of those points. We must pay more serious attention to the Mission's effectiveness and to reinvigorating the political process. We very much hope that today's resolution will play an important role in relaunching the political process.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): Ukraine voted in favour of resolution 2351 (2017), which extends the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for another year. While we realize that the resolution does not address all the concerns of some Security Council members, we would like to thank the United States delegation, as its penholder, and other colleagues for their dedicated work on it. We see the document as an effort by the Council to revive the political process on the issue of Western Sahara. At the same time, it is also a call to the parties to rise to their shared responsibility for the future of the region and its people. From now on, we urge them

to refrain from any actions that may undermine the ceasefire agreement.

It is urgent that the political process be relaunched without preconditions and in good faith. That cannot be achieved without giving full cooperation and assistance to the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General and MINURSO. Since Mr. Ross is with us today, this is a good moment to pay tribute to his dedicated efforts over the years. I want to stress that finding a just and lasting solution to the issue of Western Sahara can be achieved only through a genuine and comprehensive dialogue that can pave the way to making a settlement happen. There can be no more excuses for any delay in taking that path.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian delegation voted in favour of resolution 2351 (2017), which extends the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara. The Security Council's unified position should serve to send to the sides in the Western Sahara conflict a very strong signal with regard to the need to begin to swiftly move towards resuming direct talks between Morocco and the Polisario Front.

It is our view that overcoming antagonism and achieving a fair and lasting solution is possible only through political means in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

The final formula must be acceptable to Morocco as well as to the Polisario, and it must provide for the self-determination of the peoples of Western Sahara in the framework of the procedures in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. In that context, we think it is important that the new Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara do his utmost to resume the political process.

In conclusion, allow me to underscore that the persistent conflict in Western Sahara plays into the hands of various extremist forces, which in turn has an adverse impact on the military and political situation in the entire region.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

Before adjourning the meeting, as this is the last scheduled meeting of the Security Council for the month of April, I would like to express the sincere and heartfelt appreciation of a delegation of the United States to the members of the Council, especially our colleagues the Permanent Representatives and Deputy Permanent Representatives and their excellent teams, as well as to the hard-working secretariat of the Council, for all the support they have given to us this month. It has been a busy month, and one in which we rallied to consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it without the hard work and contributions of Council members and the representatives of the Secretariat, as well as the support of Conference Service Officers and, especially, the support of our interpreters. As we end our presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of Uruguay the best of luck in the month of May.

The meeting rose at 7.05 p.m.